

5.3

Policy options for managing drought risk;

What are we *really* trying to manage through drought-related policy?

So far we have used the terms 'vulnerability to drought' and 'resilience to drought', but what do these really mean? The term vulnerability, in particular, has been used in development circles recently, each community tending to use it in its own way, in other words with an applications-specific definition. In the case of drought we simply mean 'a condition in which an individual, household, community or society is in danger of moving to a lower state of well-being when exposed to drought and taking considerable time to recover'. Resilience is used to mean the opposite. A drought impact normally occurs by acting upon a vulnerable situation, leading to a lower state of well-being, a crisis or even a disaster. Therefore drought policy should not be focused on drought. It should focus on the conditions which make a group or situation vulnerable to the impacts of drought. Making policy choices with the implications for drought vulnerability or resilience in mind also involves managing risk and uncertainty.

In short, the risk of drought impacts is a function of both the probability of receiving unusually low levels or an unfortunate distribution of rainfall together with the current state of vulnerability of the group or system exposed, as well as the degree to which there are mechanisms and resources to respond. As such, the best way to influence policy processes in order to mainstream risk would be educate all relevant actors to recognize the fact of the complex relationship between drought and its socio-economic settings. Having established awareness, a specific diagnostic methodology must then be developed to allow policy makers to assess whether a policy option enhances or undermines resilience to drought at various scales. Once proven, this then needs to be institutionalized in to national and district level standard prioritization and planning processes.

Finally supply side activities must be complemented by demand side activities which amplify the voices of the often politically marginalized drylands users in order to help shape the higher level decisions which may create an enabling or disabling environment for their highly evolved drought risk management strategies

6.0 The role(s) of 'external' players in assisting countries enhance their resilience to drought

External players have a central role to play in assisting countries enhance their resilience to drought, among them to network and collaborate with the governments of various countries to formulate and implement sound and broad drought management systems. They can also provide resources in terms of, training, personnel, finances, and information on strategies and global best practices for reducing drought risk and vulnerability. Furthermore, they can help strengthen existing institution structures and build capacity of the countries to manage, reduce and cope with future occurrences of similar events, which will surely occur. The role(s) of external players in the process of drought-proofing, Africa will be a major topic for discussion in the expert consultation. It will ideally lead to the identification of the respective roles which development actors should play in effecting a sea change in the way we address drought risk; away from one of the dependency on emergency and humanitarian relief and towards a more proactive and integrated approach.

More information on UNDP's capacity building activities for drought resilience

UNDP Drylands Development Centre and UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention & Recovery are currently developing a drought policy options document which addresses these issues in more detail and in a more applied manner. It discusses, in particular, how the way we perceive drought influences the policy options which a) policy makers believe exist and b) Policy makers believe to be the best option(s). It also examines specific drought management policy options which have been shown to work either historically or currently worldwide and attempts to identify the situations within which they are likely to succeed in order to allow decision-makers to analyze their own situation without reinventing the wheel. This document is being prepared as part of UNDP's commitment to highlighting best practices and applied knowledge management at a policy level, and to their application for the benefit of the most marginalized populations. This document will be available electronically on the UNDP-DDC website (see below) and in hard copy in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

UNDP, through DDC, BCPR, GEF, The Climate Change Unit and Country Office programmes, amongst others also engage in concrete activities which address drought vulnerability and which are being implemented around the world.

Most development agencies have a component of drought or other related disaster risk management. They have been involved in promoting integration of disaster risk (drought) planning and preparation in to national and regional development programmes; sharing information on strategies and best practices for reducing disaster risk and vulnerability through regional and sub-regional knowledge network; thus, promoting the role of effective policy and frameworks in reducing disaster risk; supporting inter-agency disaster management training programmes available for disaster prone countries (DMTP). They are also working to mainstream drought into other development initiatives such as PRSP, gender, HIV/AIDS, food security, water management, sound governance and environmental and natural resource sustainability in the effort to realise the MDG's. At national and regional level development agencies strengthen institutional structures for sustainable disaster risk management, finance drought programmes and build capacity for prevention, mitigation, preparedness and post crisis recovery.

For those who would like more information or would be willing to review the draft document on drought policy options or contribute your own experience or to be listed as a drought policy resource person or institution please contact:

- UNDP-Drylands Development Centre: eric.patrick@undp.org
- UNDP-Bureau for Crisis Prevention & Recovery: kenneth.westgate@undp.org
- For more information on ISDR contact fengmin.kan@unon.org or Abchir@un.org

You are also invited to visit the UNDP corporate or country office web sites or the UNDP-DDC website: www.undp.org/drylands (drought information can be accessed through the 'Vulnerability' link on the home page) or the weblink of disaster reduction unit of UNDP –BCPR : www.undp.org/bcpr/disred